

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Lang: The issue of payments to farmers for grain stored on the farm is rather a distinct and different issue. We do have that matter under consideration along with many others. I have made it quite clear that I consider it to be an obvious point that the agricultural industry should arrive at some sensible conclusion about the desirable amount of inventory for the agricultural industry as a whole to hold. Having reached that decision, we must decide how and in what way the inventory should be held in order to minimize the cost of holding it and thereby maximize the return to the farmer.

Mr. A. P. Gleave (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the income of the western farmer is not only fixed but is rapidly approaching zero, can the Minister without Portfolio tell the House what real objectives the government has in terms of selling wheat and providing adequate income so that the farmers do not all go broke?

Mr. Speaker: It seems to me the hon. member is reiterating in substance a question just asked by the Leader of the Opposition.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the minister whether his declaration of defeatism and despair with regard to the western farmer represents the result of his deep thought and consideration of this problem when in London?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I do not think the question as asked is in order.

Mr. S. J. Korchinski (Mackenzie): I have a supplementary, Mr. Speaker. After the fresh-air treatment we have had from the minister I wonder whether he would clarify the situation in respect of the farmers having grain on hand to meet their 1970-71 delivery quotas by indicating what these deliveries might be? Will there be a six-bushel quota, a four-bushel quota or the unit they have this year?

Mr. Lang: It is my hope and expectation that we will be making fairly firm statements about the expectations for this year and next year in connection with delivery opportunities. I should point out to hon. members that in fact the sales effort by the Canadian Wheat Board has met with tremendous success during the current year. As a result there will be another 260 million bushels going into export during the rest of the crop year.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): I have a supplementary question for

the minister. In view of the fact that the only time a federal minister asked the western farmers to take land out of production, the government of that time paid the farmers a stated amount per acre as an incentive and as compensation for the fact that their land would not be producing any paying crop, may I ask the minister now whether it is the government's intention to pay the farmers an acreage payment for every acre they take out of production at his request?

Mr. Lang: I should like to make it perfectly clear that what has been going on so far are discussions between myself and a number of farmers about the logical position in which they are, and no statement of government policy on this has been made as yet. The question of what will be contained in a statement of government policy will have to await a statement of that policy.

Mr. Diefenbaker: How about a logical government policy?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. We will try to allow all hon. members who wish to ask supplementary questions to do so during the 40-minute question period, but perhaps we should try to limit ourselves as much as possible and allow individual members one or two supplementary questions each, which will just about take up the 40 minutes.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): May I ask the minister one further supplementary question. Are we to understand from the minister's statement now that he was not enunciating government policy but merely telling the farmers how to farm, and that the government has no intention whatsoever of compensating the farmers for following his advice?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

[Later:]

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): I wish to direct a supplementary question to the Minister without Portfolio in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board. In view of the fact that the minister is quoted as saying, in the context of his remarks that farmers leave their wheat land idle, "that there were 24 million acres planted to wheat last year that cannot be usefully switched to another crop", will the minister advise the House whether it is his opinion and that of his officials that all other grain commodities that might be grown on this land are now in sufficient or surplus